



**A Reformed  
Semi-Monthly  
Magazine**

# ***The Standard Bearer***

## **In This Issue:**

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Meditation — <i>Herman Hoeksema</i><br><b>The Faith of God</b> .....   | 50 |
| Editorial — <i>Prof. David J. Engelsma</i><br><b>The Sad Case of Bert Zandstra</b> .....                       | 53 |
| Letters .....  | 55 |
| All Around Us — <i>Rev. Gise J. VanBaren</i> .....   | 56 |
| Cloud of Witnesses — <i>Prof. Herman C. Hanko</i><br><b>Herman Hoeksema: Theologian and Reformer (2)</b> ..... | 58 |
| Search the Scriptures — <i>Rev. Mitchell C. Dick</i><br><b>The Raising of Lazarus</b> .....                    | 60 |
| Address at Annual RFPA Meeting — <i>Rev. Mitchell C. Dick</i><br><b>The RFPA and Religious Stew (1)</b> .....  | 62 |
| Annual RFPA Meeting — <i>Mr. Bob Vermeer</i><br><b>Secretary's Report</b> .....                                | 65 |
| Taking Heed to the Doctrine — <i>Rev. Steven R. Key</i><br><b>Jesus, Jehovah-Salvation (2)</b> .....           | 67 |
| Go Ye Into All the World — <i>Rev. Allen J. Brummel</i><br><b>Animism</b> .....                                | 68 |
| News From Our Churches — <i>Mr. Benjamin Wigger</i> .....  | 71 |

**Vol. 74, No. 3  
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# The Faith of God

*For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?*

*God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar.* Romans 3:3, 4a

**F**or what if some did not believe? This is a very real and extremely practical question. What if some do not believe? Then what? Then what will you say? Then what will your answer be? What if some do not believe?

Of course, you do not feel how cutting and practical this question is as long as you stay strictly with the text and ask, "What if some of the *Jews* did not believe?" But what if some of *us* do not believe? Putting the question in this form, it becomes more real to you and me. What if some of the children of the covenant do not believe? What if some of the children of our own church do not believe? Or if you want to feel it more intensely, what if some of them be your own flesh

and blood? What if it be some of your babes, which you brought up, which you instructed in the fear and admonition of the Lord, and for whom you prayed, pleading, "Lord, save them"? What if some of them do not believe? What will you say then?

This is precisely the question which the apostle asks in the text. True, he is speaking of the Jew. In the first part of the chapter he has asked the question, "What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision?" This question arises in his mind because he realizes that the Jews will ask this question of him, on account of what he had said. "What," so the Jew would say, "if it is true what you have written, if all are to be judged according to their works, the Jew first and also the Greek, if circumcision profiteth nothing, if the Jew has no advantage, if there

be no difference between Jew and Gentile, if there is no respect of persons with God, what advantage then hath the Jew?" If it makes no difference whether you belong to the church or to the world, what advantage then is it to belong to the church?

The apostle answers, "Much every way." But the advantage of the Jew and the profit of circumcision must not be sought in anything that he is or does, but in the gift of God. The advantage of the Jew is not in his religion, is not in his being a Jew, is not in circumcision. But the advantage of the Jew is this, chiefly, that he has the oracles of God, that he has God's Word.

But this raises another question. If the Jew has the Word of God, what then if some do not believe? What then is your answer? Do you then turn Arminian? Do you then say, yes, but through his unbelief

*Herman Hoeksema was the first editor of the Standard Bearer.*

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man makes the faith of God of no effect? Do you then make God a liar?

The apostle answers: "God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar." This is the reason why some do not believe.

### Revealed

The apostle speaks of the faith of God. "Does their unbelief make the faith of God of no effect?" You understand immediately that faith in this connection does not mean "to believe." It does not mean faith in the sense of believing, as the word is used with respect to us. But faith in the text has the significance of faithfulness. The apostle is asking, "Does the unbelief of them who do not believe make the faithfulness of God of no effect?" Faith in this sense is constancy, is really unchangeableness. Faith in this sense is that in a certain relation one remains unchangeable. When anyone in a certain relation always reveals himself as he is expected to reveal himself in that relation, this particular party in this particular relation is faithful. So, God is faithful.

Reverently speaking, God could not be anything but faithful. The root of God's faithfulness is His unchangeableness. God is faithful. He is, in the first place, faithful in Himself. He is the faithful covenant God as the triune God. In the covenant relation of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, every one of the three persons does that which is in harmony with that relation.

In the second place, the faithfulness of God means that He is constant, that He is unchangeable, in His relation to His people. Always in respect to His people He stands in a relation of covenant friendship. He gives them life, forgiveness of sin, righteousness, and eternal glory.

It is especially to this latter faith of God that the text calls attention. The phrase, therefore, may be paraphrased thus: "Does the unbelief of some who do not be-

lieve cause God to break His covenant relation with His people, so that He does not save them, does not forgive their sins, does not deliver them from the power of death, and does not give them eternal life and glorify them?"

"Does the faith of God depend upon the faith of man?" This is the question.

The faith of God has been revealed, according to the context. The apostle says that the Jews had the oracles of God. The oracles of God are the Word of God. They are the Old Testament Scriptures. They are really the one Word of God. That the apostle uses the plural is due to the fact that he refers to the different times in which that one Word was given. God gave His Word to Adam, to Enoch, to Noah, to Abraham, to Israel. This one Word of God became oracles. Those words, the apostle says, were committed to the Jews. Or as the Dutch has it, they were *entrusted* to the Jews.

To have the Word of God is a trust. To have the Word of God is a terrible thing for sinful man. It is not just given to him, but it is entrusted to him. Now the apostle says that the Jews were entrusted with the Word of God, just as God has entrusted that Word to us. The chief content of that Word is the promise.

What is the advantage of the Jew? Or what profit is there in circumcision? Translating into New Testament language, we would say: What is the advantage of the church, or what is the profit of baptism?

Chiefly this, that to the church the oracles of God have been entrusted. The advantage of having the Word of God is that the content of these oracles is the promise: I will establish My covenant with you. This is the content of that one Word of God. This is the content of the gospel. God says: I will establish My covenant with you, I will redeem you from sin, I will deliver you from corruption, I

will lift you up into glory. This is the advantage.

### Questioned

Now then, what if some do not believe—some who had those oracles, some who were entrusted with that Word of God's promise? What if some of them do not believe? How do you explain that?

You understand that the apostle is speaking of an awful fact. The apostle asks, "What if some did not believe?" The apostle has been criticized because he says "some." Because there were so many who did not believe, the apostle has been criticized for saying "some." But he says "some," not because he did not know that there would be many who did not believe, but in comparison with the glory that is to be revealed unto them who are to be saved. But it is an awful fact.

Oh, there is a world of trouble and sorrow in this question of the apostle: "What if some do not believe?" For the apostle is not thinking of a few in his own day. But he is thinking of all them who did not believe throughout the history of the Old Testament people of God. Ever since God spoke through Moses, there had been this "some." They did not believe. Thus, they made God a liar. It made no difference how that Word came to them, they did not believe. When the oracles of God came to them, they said to the bearers of these oracles, "Get out of the way!" So they did in the desert, so they did with the prophets, so they did with Christ. The essence of this attitude with respect to the Word of God is that they called God a liar. As it was in the old dispensation, so it is in the new. When God commits His oracles to His people, this "some" is always there.

This is an awful thing. It is so awful that those who brought these oracles to the people of God in the Old Testament and those who bring them in the new dispensation sometimes say, "Blot me out



of the book of life. Rather than that my brethren perish, blot me out of Thy book." This was the testimony of Moses when he saw that some did not believe. This same apostle Paul said: "I could wish to be accursed from Christ, for my brethren according to the flesh."

Is it not a grief when you have, say, a half dozen children, who all receive these same oracles of God, and when they come to years of discretion to see some of them go astray? Is it not a grief that no matter how you plead with them, there is a number of them who say to these oracles of God, "God is a liar"? Is it not a grief if in the congregation, after having labored with all your might, you see the same effect? Some do not believe, and the consistory goes after them, but they do not believe and they say, "God is a liar." This is such a grief that it is killing.

What if some do not believe? What will you say then? This is the question. Shall we say that the faith of God is made of no effect? Shall we question the faith of God? This is possible in two ways. The first is this: God brings His Word to man. He brings this Word to the Jews, to the church, promiscuously. When He does, He says to everyone: I promise to give you eternal life. I promise to forgive your sins, to deliver you from corruption, to glorify you. This is the faith of God. When some do not believe, their unbelief makes the faith of God impossible. Is this your explanation? Is there a general offer which is brought to everyone, head for head, and if you do not believe, you make the faith of God of no effect? God forbid! Then the unbelief of man would make it impossible for God to save him.

Or the question of the apostle may mean that the faithfulness of God is not true. Perhaps it means that God is not faithful. Do not say that you never allege this. When we parents appear before the throne of grace and say, "Please

save my children because we have the covenant promise," but some do not believe, what then? What if God does not hear our petition (and He does not always)? What then is your answer? Oh, we do not put it this way. But I experience this rebellion, this unbelief, in my heart which says that God is not faithful. If faith is a gift of God and is included in the promise, and if some do not believe, does not then their unbelief prove that God is unfaithful to His promise? God forbid! God forbid that our unbelief should make the faith of God impossible. God forbid that our unbelief should prove that God is not faithful to His Word.

#### Maintained

What does the apostle answer? He does not explain. But he throws this accusation far from him. This is the explanation, and this is the purpose why some do not believe: That every man be a liar and that God be true. That is, the purpose why some do not believe is that it may become ever increasingly evident that man is a liar, and that it may become ever increasingly evident that God is true.

Man is a liar. We always lie about God, by nature. This is so strong that if we examine our hearts as Christians and then read this word, we find in our heart this testimony, that we do not want it. Still stronger, this is so true that

when our sinful heart overwhelms the principle of new life and we read this word we say, "I do not want it." This becomes evident. It becomes clearly evident. This becomes evident in the heathen world. But it becomes far more evident if the oracles of God come. This word, from which there is no hiding, this word, which speaks to you and to me directly, this word says to us, "Listen to me. Listen to the word that can bring you near to God." But unless God changes our lying heart, we will say, "I do not want it." This is why they killed the prophets. This becomes evident. That some who do not believe must have the oracles of God is in order that it may become evident that sinful man is a liar who always lies about God. This must become evident in the judgment.

It must also become evident that God is true. That is, although some do not believe, God fulfills His promise to everyone to whom He has promised it. The perfected church shall be an everlasting testimony that God is true, just as the outer darkness shall be a testimony that man is a liar. If we really take this answer, we have peace. For God doeth all things well.

What shall we say then? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God of no effect? No, but we will say this: Let God ever increasingly become true, and let man ever increasingly become a liar. □

#### *Blessed Thought*

(John 1:12)

A child of God am I!

God's love to me is sure!  
No storms of life can harm me;  
With Him I am secure.

A child of God am I!

And thus I'm set apart;  
I now forsake the things of earth,  
For Christ lives in my heart.

A child of God am I!

For I have been set free;  
Bought with the Savior's precious blood  
One day at Calvary.

A child of God am I!

And so I sing His praise!  
My heart is filled with songs of joy;  
I'll serve Him all my days.

A child of God am I!

I wonder just how long  
Till I shall see my Savior's face  
And sing the Victor's song.

*Annetta Jansen*



# The Sad Case of Bert Zandstra

Bert Zandstra is a 30-year old adulterer.

Married with three little children, he fell in love with a younger woman. He then abandoned his wife and children, to live with his lover. Within a year, he divorced his wife and married the object of his lust. Whether she too had been married and had children, so that Bert Zandstra destroyed two families in his passion, is not clear. It makes no difference to the story.

Bert Zandstra's is a sad case.

What makes his case still sadder is that Bert Zandstra sinned against better knowledge. He was a church member. He was member of a Reformed church. The church is conservative. It claims to be a true church of Jesus Christ, based solidly on the "Three Forms of Unity," if not the only true church. When Bert Zandstra left his family, to take up with his paramour, the consistory admonished him. He quickly left the church, asking for his membership papers.

Zandstra moved to a town some 60 miles from his old home and church. There within a year he married his new wife and set about making a new start in life. This included church life. Bert and the new Mrs. Zandstra began attending regularly the Reformed church in town. It is a congregation in the same denomination as the church that Bert left a year earlier. It is a sister church in the federation with the church 60 miles away of which the original Mrs. Zandstra is a member with her, and Bert's, children. Soon Bert and his

second wife appeared at the consistory meeting asking to be admitted to the church as members in good standing.

Now the sad case of Bert Zandstra becomes tragic.

The Reformed church accepted Mr. and Mrs. Bert Zandstra as members. It worked with them first, especially Bert. It charged him with sin and required confession. It looked for evidence of sorrow in Bert's attitude. Bert even came to cry some tears over what he had done a year or two earlier. The church forgave him in the name of Jesus. The consistory had him write a letter to his first wife, expressing that he was sorry that he had sinned against her and asking for her forgiveness. In a postscript, the letter added that one day, when the children had grown up, Bert would also confess to them. On a certain Sunday morning, the minister read an announcement to the congregation, informing them of Bert's repentance and of the admission of him and his new wife to the fellowship of the church.

Why, then, some will ask, is this a sad case?

Bert and the second Mrs. Zandstra are happy, are they not? They are now good church members, are they not? There is already talk that Bert may be deacon, even elder, someday. Has not the church earnestly worked for repentance? Did not Bert show sorrow to the point of tears? Who dares to speak of a *sad* case?

Yes, there are, unfortunately,

the original Mrs. Zandstra, now alone, and three children growing up without a father. It could be wished that this were different. But that is the way life is: there are hardships. And life must go on.

Nevertheless, the case of Bert Zandstra is a sad case. Nor is this merely a personal opinion. It is the judgment of God upon this case and all who are involved, with the exception of the original, and true, Mrs. Zandstra and her children. This is the judgment of God in His Word, which will stand regardless of the contrary words of Bert Zandstra and of the Reformed churches that are conniving at his sin.

Bert Zandstra is an adulterer, an impenitent adulterer, according to God's Word: "Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her" (Mark 10:11). So also is his new wife: "... and whosoever shall marry her (or him) that is divorced committeth adultery" (Matt. 5:32b). No adulterer or adulteress will inherit the kingdom of God (I Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5: 19-21).

The Reformed church that has admitted him and his new wife to the fellowship of the congregation has admitted a man and a woman to the Lord's Table who by their life "declare themselves unbelieving and ungodly," to use the language of Q. 82 of the Heidelberg Catechism. The consistory has profaned the covenant and brought the wrath of God down upon the whole congregation (Heid. Cat., Q.



82). The denomination that tolerates and approves such wicked behavior on the part of a member and on the part of a local church shares in the guilt and exposes itself to the divine judgment. One certain, dreadful aspect of the divine judgment will be that the number of Bert Zandstras in the church will increase and multiply (I Cor. 5:6).

Bert Zandstra is fictitious. He represents real men (and women), as his case represents real cases, in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("liberated"). But he is imaginary. The editor of the church paper of this denomination, *De Reformatie*, invented him so that the editor could write about such real cases in his churches in a concrete, vivid way. In three articles in *De Reformatie*, under the rubric, "Church Life," Prof. Dr. M. te Velde urged the readmittance of such as Bert Zandstra into the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("liberated") in the way outlined above (see *De Ref.*, 18 Mei; 25 Mei; and 1 Juni 1996).

We recognize that the editor of *De Reformatie* is concerned lest readmittance of the Bert Zandstras become too easy. He fears that the churches are, in fact, accepting the Bert Zandstras without confession of sin and reconciliation. He has good and important things to say about the need today for ministers to preach sharply against divorce. He calls on the members of the congregation to pray for and talk to married persons whose marriages are troubled. But in the end, he and his churches take Bert Zandstra back, remarried.

This is a sad case.

It is a sad case, first, because of the nature of the sin. Divorcing his wife and abandoning his children, the adulterer broke the vow that he made to God at his marriage and the vow, thrice repeated, that he made to God at the baptism of his children. Divorcing his wife, he not only cruelly injures her but also likely causes her to commit adultery, and perish everlast-

ingly, as Christ teaches in Matthew 5:32. For now it is likely that she will remarry, "and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery." He himself tramples upon that ordinance of God that is fundamental both to society and to the church and that has the glorious significance that it symbolizes the covenant of God with His people in Christ (Ezek. 16; Eph. 5:22ff.). He dishonors God, and he hates his nearest neighbors, his own wife and children.

It is a sad case, second, because of the faulty handling of the case, church politically. Bert Zandstra is allowed to seek readmission to the denomination in another congregation (hypothetically, Boshuizen) than the congregation that he left (hypothetically, Hoogbergen). This is permitted by the church, even though he lives only 60 miles from the church that he left. But there in Hoogbergen are the elders who knew his case well and who worked with him when he fell into sin. There is the body of Christ that he offended and then forsook. The autonomy of the local church and, with this, the Dordt church order's prohibition against one church's lording it over another church demand that a penitent Zandstra betake himself to the church which he left, when he seeks readmission.

It is a sad case, third, because the gospel-grace of repentance is corrupted both by Bert Zandstra and by the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("liberated"). Repentance is not mere acknowledgment, under pressure, that one has sinned, not even when the confession is made public. Nor is repentance a mere feeling of sorrow, not even when this feeling produces a few tears. (After all, even Bert Zandstra, before he falls pleasantly off to sleep in the arms of his young wife, must have a fleeting thought of the real Mrs. Zandstra, crying alone in her bed, as well as of three little children without a father.) Repentance is heartfelt sor-

row over one's sin against God that *turns in abhorrence from that sin*. The penitent sinner turns from his sin to God, not only as one seeking forgiveness but also as one fleeing his sin, resolved to live now according to the will of God (Heid. Cat., LD 33).

The repentance of a man who says, "I am sorry," while living deliberately and contentedly in his sin is hypocrisy. It is disgusting to God. It meets with no forgiveness from Him, regardless what a church may say.

Let Bert Zandstra bring forth works worthy of repentance. These works are not that he lives faithfully with his new wife. These works are that he stop committing adultery with a woman who is not his lawful wife in the sight of God. The church must not brush this off by saying that once the man has remarried "the way of return to the first marriage has been cut off." Perhaps this is so. But the way of breaking with his adulterous marriage has not been cut off. The church faithful to the Word of Jesus Christ will say to Bert Zandstra, "Are you truly repentant? Do you now indeed know your despicable sin against God, your wife, your children, and the woman to whom you are now married? Then you will no longer live with your new wife. This is part of genuine repentance, and the proof of the reality of it."

The gospel is at stake here: the free grace of God in Jesus Christ that forgives sins and reconciles the sinner to God and the church is a grace bestowed and received only in the way of repentance. And repentance is such a sorrow over sin as breaks with the sin. Therefore, salvation is also at stake here. Bert Zandstra goes to hell, as does his new wife. Only now he goes merrily to hell, supposing that all is well with his soul. The Reformed church is responsible.

How frivolous Zandstra's repentance really is comes out in his behavior toward his real wife and



children. The church permits him to write his wife a letter confessing his sin against her. From 60 miles away, he writes her a letter! One imagines the letter:

Dear Mrs. Bert Zandstra,

This is to inform you that I am sorry that I sinned against you. Please forgive me. Tell the children that I am sorry.

Yours faithfully,  
Bert

Were such a man sorry, truly sorry by the grace worked by the Spirit of Christ, he would *crawl* from Boshuizen to Hoogbergen on his hands and knees. He would confess to his wife and children to their faces in tears. He would assure them that he now finds it absolutely impossible to live with the other woman, as impossible as Christ finds it to live with another than His church. And he would plead with his wife to have him back, if she possibly could.

If the man sends a letter, his wife should throw it in the wastebasket unopened.

It is a sad case, fourth, because it shows that the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("liberated") have caved in to the world. They have caved in to the world, not in some incidental matter but in the fundamental matter of marriage. Marriage is basic to

God's continuing His covenant in the line of the generations of His chosen people. Marriage is the earthly symbol of God's covenant with His people in Christ. The articles in *De Reformatie* make clear that the occasion for procedures to accept the Bert Zandstras and their new wives is an "epidemic" of divorces and remarriages in the churches. The churches become worldly. They cannot withstand the pressure of the godless, adulterous, faithless world. It is not so much that wicked members divorce and remarry as it is that the churches make their peace with the sin. They permit Bert Zandstra and his new wife to sit at the Lord's Table. This is shame to the church. This is scandal to the saints. This is dishonor to God and His Christ.

If this is happening in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("liberated"), it is happening also in most of the other Reformed churches in the Netherlands.

It is happening in the conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches in the United States as well.

For the case of Bert Zandstra is sad, fifth, in that it shows the bitter fruit of the erroneous conception of marriage that has prevailed generally in the Reformed churches. This is the view of marriage as a contract that sin and sinners can break. Until recently,

sounder Reformed and Presbyterian churches have restricted the right of divorce and remarriage to the "innocent party," that is, the husband or wife whose mate has committed adultery. The churches have forbidden remarriage to the guilty party. They have not allowed the Bert Zandstras membership in their fellowship.

Now the churches approve the remarriage of the *guilty* party. Church membership is open to them. Men and women may divorce and remarry for any reason and be received as members in good standing in the congregations. This is actually what is going on in many, if not most, of the churches that loudly proclaim their conservatism. Many in our country do not write this for the public. They are not honest, as is the editor of *De Reformatie*. In their public utterances, they insist that only the "innocent" or "deserted" party may remarry. In the life of their churches, guilty parties—the Bert Zandstras—are received with their new mates. In this country too, it is now an epidemic.

This is what it comes to, when the church does not confess and practice the lifelong, unbreakable bond of marriage.

The sad case of Bert Zandstra.

□

—DJE

## Letters

### ■ Sound Works on Amillennialism

I am a Primitive Baptist minister from Memphis, TN and a long-time subscriber to the *Standard Bearer*. I appreciated very much your series of articles on "A Defense of (Reformed) Amillennialism." Can you recommend other works which are sound on this subject? I have some friends who are historic premillennialists, and I am trying to convince them of their error.

In passing, I do not want to sound overly critical, but Andrew Fuller is not one about whom you should be saying very much in a favorable light. If you would read some of the things that he has written, you would realize that you have much more in common with John Gill than you do with Fuller.

Zack M. Guess  
Memphis, TN

### Response:

Recommended works on the

amillennial view of the end include the relevant section in Herman Hoeksema's *Reformed Dogmatics* and his commentary on Revelation, *Behold, He Cometh!* (both are published by the RFPA in Grandville); Anthony Hoekema's essay in *The Meaning of the Millennium*, Robert G. Clouse, ed. (InterVarsity, 1977); and Herman Bavinck's penetrating treatment in the recent book, *The Last Things: Hope for This World and the Next*, John Bolt, ed. (Baker, 1996). —Ed.



## ■ Again, the "All" of I Timothy 2:4

I do see my faults, and I admit that I had erred in my letter to you concerning the "all" of I Timothy 2:4 (*Standard Bearer*, Sept. 15, 1997, pp. 488, 489). In the light of John 6:37, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me," as well as many other supportive verses, it is impossible that I Timothy 2:4 could refer to every human without exception. Rather, it refers "to the divine sovereignty in disposing to salvation" (Schrenk *TDNT* III:47).

I thank you for setting me straight, although at first I resented that you did so publicly. Perhaps it was best that you did so to re-

buke any others who held my view, as well as preventing others to lapse into this error.

"Salvation is of the Lord" and totally undeserved. We are all sinners and without hope except for the gracious sovereign will of God.

May God bless you and give you added strength in upholding the great doctrines of the faith.

Charles B. Gross

Trenton, NJ

Response:

It is a joy to receive your letter.

The purpose of my public criticism of the earlier (public) defense

of taking "all" in I Timothy 2:4 as "every human without exception" was indeed that others also might learn. Incredibly, these views are rampant among confessedly Reformed people in our oddest of ages. The teaching of universal, ineffectual grace is Calvinist orthodoxy; the doctrine of sovereign, particular grace is "hyper-Calvinist" heresy.

Holding and publicly defending the doctrine that "'salvation is of the Lord' and totally undeserved," with the clear implication that grace is particular and sovereign, you show yourself a friend of the great doctrines of election and predestination. —Ed.

## All Around Us

### ■ Strange Bed-fellows!

Rev. Robert Schuller has a way of getting his name regularly in the press. Recently there has been reported an altercation which took place on a plane. But his association with people of every religion seems the more newsworthy—particularly because he is a minister in the Reformed Church in America. His statements made in connection with unusual visits are appalling. One wonders how any "Reformed" man could place himself in such a position. The *Grand Rapids Press*, September 1, 1997, reported:

One of the most visible American "televangelists," the Rev. Robert Schuller, made a broad appeal for Christian-Muslim understanding Sunday, delivering a keynote address before a large gathering of American Muslims at the Meadows.

"What we really are trying to do is to show that America can accommodate the three Abrahamic religions," said Imam Alfred Mohammed, of Elizabeth, NJ, who

is involved in the annual convention of the Muslim American Society.

"I think it's a major event in American religion, because of the fact that you're seeing one of the leaders of a major school in Christianity reaching out to Muslim leaders."

...Schuller, a graduate of Western Theological Seminary in Holland, also wields influence through his weekly "Hour of Power" TV program, which reaches 20 million viewers from his Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, Calif.

The cathedral houses an organization called Christians and Muslims for Peace, whose founder, Bill Baker, helped set up a meeting at the cathedral between Schuller and Mohammed last year.

"They spent two hours together," said Michael Nason, a Schuller spokesman. "That was when he extended the invitation." On that visit Schuller told Mohammed that if he came back in 100 years and found his descendants Muslim, it wouldn't bother him—so long as they weren't atheists.

About two years earlier Schuller had attended a conference in Gabon, in west central Africa, where he encountered many Muslims, including Betty Shabazz, the

widow of the slain Muslim leader, Malcolm X.

From that point until her death last month, Shabazz and Schuller were friends. "That is why he was invited by the family to the funeral," Nason said.

What does Scripture declare? "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?" (II Cor. 6:14-15). He would not even be disturbed if his grandchildren became Muslims? But Schuller evidently places himself above Scripture. Nor could he support or encourage mission work among Jews or Muslims. One wonders what the Reformed Church in America thinks of all of this—or does it not care?

Schuller was to be found also at the funeral of Mother Teresa in India. He had her speak on his "Hour of Power" some years ago and claimed to be a great admirer of her too. Darrell Maurina of the United Reformed Press Service reports:

Rev. VanBaren is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Loveland, Colorado.



This morning, Schuller participated in Mother Teresa's own funeral as a member of the official United States delegation to the event in Calcutta, India. Schuller, a graduate of Hope College and Western Theological Seminary who pastors the largest congregation in the 313,000-member Reformed Church in America, is a personal friend of First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton who headed the United States delegation.

Schuller, whose "Hour of Power" television program counts over 20 million viewers worldwide, first met Mother Teresa in Mexico in 1989. The Roman Catholic nun, known worldwide as founder and head of the Missionaries of Charity order devoted to poverty relief among the "poorest of the poor" in India and eighty other countries, gave Schuller a prayer at that time that still hangs in his office.

"Be all and only for Jesus," reads the prayer. "Let him use you without him having to consult you first."

In a statement issued by Schuller's press office, Schuller said Mother Teresa was the "first lady of the twentieth century."

Mother Teresa "taught us that God has given us a responsibility to our brothers and sisters to look after and care for them," said Schuller.

It appears that the Reformation also has no real importance in the eyes of Schuller. Whether Roman Catholic, Jew, or Muslim—all appear to have equal standing in the eyes of Schuller. Is he a preacher of the cross—or a deceiver of many?

### ■ Which Killing is Worse?

The *Denver Post*, September 13, 1997, reports on a bizarre incident—but one which gives pause for serious thought. The account is of three high school students who cruelly killed many cats and injured others.

They are accused of driving off,

first to pick up two baseball bats and then to sneak into a certain white house with blue trim at the edge of town—a haven for strays founded by a couple who had moved to central Iowa from Los Angeles.

The next morning, the shelter's driveway resembled a triage site, an animal M.A.S.H. Veterinarians sorted through the bashed and bloodied, deciding which to treat on the spot and which to rush off for the hour's drive to care at Iowa State University.

...As a November trial looms, Morrissey's office has filed thousands of letters and printouts of e-mail from all over the globe into a cache of cardboard boxes.

Nearly every missive clamors for prison for Lamansky and Myers, who have pleaded not guilty. The writers quote the Bible and Gandhi, and refer darkly to serial killers Ted Bundy and Jeffrey Dahmer.

Send a message, they urge, that beating animals to death is a serious crime. "I hope some judge doesn't order community service," wrote Rita... of Cleveland. "I pray they get the max!"

It is, of course, a horrible crime—and another indication of the "moral meltdown" in our society today. But is it any wonder? When unborn babes can be ripped from their mothers' wombs, cruelly destroyed, a million and a half annually in our country, is it any wonder that children grow up placing little or no value on life—of animal or of man? One wonders, too, if those raising a hue and cry for a good prison sentence for these young people, cry equally insistently for the punishment of the abortionist? Terrible though the crime of these high school students was, it is hardly equal to the killing of the unborn!

### ■ Great Divorce Cover-up Exposed

In a striking article, Cal Thomas, syndicated columnist for the Los Angeles Times, writes of the "great divorce cover-up finally ex-

posed." The report is appalling and the conclusion correct.

The biggest cover-up in the last quarter-century has nothing to do with Richard Nixon, Bill Clinton or even politics. It has been the cover-up about the impact divorce has had on a generation of children. Now, that cover has been blown by the release of a lengthy study of middle- and upper-middle-class families from Marin County, Calif., by psychologist and divorce research expert Judith Wallerstein and Julia Lewis, a psychology professor at San Francisco State University.

The folks who gave us "no-fault" divorce and tried to persuade us that it mattered not how we lived, only that we be "happy," have inflicted profound unhappiness on countless children abandoned by their parents.

The report, the result of a 25-year study, traces the effect divorce has had on 60 families, including 26 very young lives—children aged 2 to 5 when their parents broke up. Wallerstein and Lewis show that far from just the initial impact on children, which fades with time, divorce is a cumulative experience that produces stark emotional scars and shapes the attitudes, behavior and relationships of the children of divorce unto adulthood.

Half of those studied became seriously involved with drugs and alcohol. Many of the children, especially the girls, became sexually active early in adolescence. Though many fathers held degrees in professions that allowed them to make a good living, not one father provided full financial support for his child's college education and one-fourth stopped sending any financial help after the children turned 18.

...The major media and various interest groups were telling us that divorce is normal and that few are profoundly affected for lengthy periods when their parents split. If ever there was a case of denial, this was it. Many who wanted us to be "sensitive" about the feelings of other categories of humanity (and the animal and plant kingdom) were far less con-



cerned about the impact of the "divorce culture".... Children in single-parent families are six times as likely to be poor, she notes. And children of divorce are two to three times as likely as those in two-parent homes to have emotional and behavioral problems. But who cares in a culture that promotes personal and instant "happiness" as the only goal worthy of pursuit?

That attitude has melted much

of the glue that held our society together. Some still deny divorce is a catastrophe because many cannot stand to face the reality and consequences of what they've done to themselves, their children and their nation.

If the report by Wallerstein and Lewis had been about business rather than family, the children of divorce would have the right to file a class-action suit—citing

breach of contract by their parents.

Amen!! But above all, God's Word forbids divorce. To break up what God designed to be a picture of the relationship between Christ and His church will bring consequences not only upon the parents, but upon their children and children's children. Those consequences we see on every hand in our society today. □

Cloud of Witnesses

Prof. Herman Hanko

## Herman Hoeksema: Theologian and Reformer (2)

### Controversy In His First Charge

From the day Hoeksema entered the ministry in 14<sup>th</sup> St. Christian Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan to the day he died, his life can be characterized as one of controversy.

It has been alleged that his controversy-filled life was due to his own constant efforts to "pick a fight." He was, so it has been said, willing "to go to the mat" for anything and everything. This is a grievous slander and one which will not stand the scrutiny of unbiased men.

One must understand a bit the background in the church in America of which he was a part.

The members of the Christian Reformed Church in the first half-century of its existence were almost exclusively from the *Afscheiding*. While indeed this movement in the Netherlands was a true reformation of the church, and while several of

its leaders were strongly Reformed, weaknesses in doctrine also ran through the movement, and not all the leaders were equally Reformed. These strengths and weaknesses were also present in the Christian Reformed Church. It was not as Reformed as it should have been. Especially strains of Arminianism were present in some parts of it. Doctrines such as the well-meant offer of the gospel, a universal love of God, and salvation dependent on the free will of man were openly taught. In some places there was strong opposition to Christian education, and in other places the urge to "Americanize" the church led the church into unholy unions with un-Reformed organizations.

At about and shortly after the turn of the century, immigrants from the movement of Dr. Abraham Kuyper joined the Christian Reformed Church. They were a different kind of folk. Many of them held to Kuyper's rejection of the well-meant offer of the gospel, but others had been taken in by Kuyper's common grace, a common grace which was quite different in emphasis from that of the earlier immigrants. Both groups

were present in the church, and the struggle for control of the church was long and sometimes bitter.

Hoeksema, an heir to the piety of the people of the *Afscheiding* and to the doctrines of sovereign and particular grace in the Kuyper followers, had early come to the conclusion that the battle for the future of the church was to be fought—as it had been throughout the ages—in defense of sovereign and particular grace over against Arminianism and Pelagianism. But he saw, early in his ministry, that the truths of sovereign grace applied not only to the sovereignty of God in the work of salvation, but equally strongly to the antithetical walk of God's covenant people in the world. The common grace of the well-meant offer was a threat to the former; Kuyper's common grace a threat to the latter.

Into the ministry in this denomination Hoeksema entered, and through the maze of conflicting ideas he had to find his way, which, he was determined, would be the way of the historic Reformed faith. This brought him into controversy.

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It started early. In his very first charge he faced opposition over two matters: his strong support of Christian schools, and the emphasis in his preaching on sovereign grace rooted in double predestination. His steady hand on the tiller of the congregation, however, steered the people of God through many dangerous shoals: those who were not persuaded left for elsewhere, while many learned to be thankful for a man who would direct them in a way consistently Reformed.

The years were those of World War I. Patriotism became all but an idol, and blind patriotism the order of the day. Churches, in bursts of patriotic fervor, put the flag of our country on the pulpit. Hoeksema refused—not because he was not aware of his calling to be in subjection to the magistracy, but because the church's business was conducted in the sanctuary of the church, and that church is catholic, not bound to one country. Threatened by zealots in the community, he was forced for a while to carry a pistol in self-defense.

One great doctrinal controversy in the Christian Reformed Church at large involved Hoeksema during this time. It was a controversy over dispensational premillennialism. Hoeksema took a leading role in pointing out to the church the fact that such a position was contrary to the Reformed confessions because it denied that Christ is the King of the church, and his efforts were instrumental in protecting the church from a dangerous heresy.

### Continuing Controversy

Hoeksema's second charge was in Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. This was the church where my father and paternal grandparents were members.

Here, too, Hoeksema's life was filled with controversy.

The first controversy was in no respect of his making. It involved

the teachings of Dr. Ralph Janssen in the seminary. This professor of Old Testament denied the infallible inspiration of Scripture and brought into his instruction higher critical methods. His four colleagues in the seminary objected to his teachings, but could not secure a condemnation of his views by the churches in their broader assemblies. Hoeksema was finally brought into the battle, even though Dr. Janssen was a member of his congregation. Hoeksema's careful and thorough work as part of a study committee, presented to the Synod of 1922, was the basis for Janssen's condemnation.

The irony of it was, however, that Dr. Janssen used Kuyperian common grace to justify his higher critical methods, knowing full well that Hoeksema, already then, repudiated the doctrine. Although the issue of common grace was not faced by the Synod of 1922, it became the occasion for Hoeksema's expulsion from the Christian Reformed Church.

This brief biography is not the place either to discuss the issues or to trace in detail the history. We can only briefly describe what happened.

Faced with several protests against Hoeksema's denial of common grace and various overtures asking for a statement on common grace, the synod of the Christian Reformed Church meeting in Kalamazoo, Michigan, adopted a doctrinal statement that combined the well-meant offer of the gospel and Kuyperian common grace into one decision. Although informed by Hoeksema that he would never subscribe to such an unbiblical and anti-confessional statement, the synod refused to discipline him and, in fact, pronounced him fundamentally Reformed—although with a tendency towards oneness.

Hoeksema's critics were not satisfied, and they finally prevailed upon the classis of which Hoeksema was a part to require ab-

solute subscription to the doctrine of common grace or to face suspension from the office of the ministry.

Upon Hoeksema's refusal, the classis suspended him and set his consistory and the congregation outside the denomination.

Thus, January 1925 marks the beginning of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America.

Two other ministers, from a different classis, were deposed as well for the same reasons: Revs. H. Danhof and G. M. Ophoff. Their congregations were also expelled.

These were busy years. Herman Hoeksema was the pastor of a congregation numbering more than 500 families; he taught dogmatics and all New Testament subjects in the seminary which was formed immediately after 1925 to train the denomination's own ministers; he wrote extensively for the *Standard Bearer*, a semi-monthly Reformed periodical, and served as its editor; he traveled around the country, speaking in the many places to which he had been invited; he was full-time radio pastor from 1940 to 1963; he wrote a number of books, most of which are in print today.

The enormous amount of work which he performed took its toll, and in June of 1947 he suffered a massive stroke in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on his way to Manhattan, Montana, where my father was pastor and I lived with my family.

The Lord gave him recovery from the stroke—not complete, but sufficient that he could take up his work once more in his church and in the churches.

### The Last Battle

It was evident that the Lord gave him recovery because one more battle in defense of sovereign grace had to be fought. It happened in the early '50s. The battle was over the question whether salvation is conditional—a clear and forceful attack against the doctrine of sovereign grace.



Dr. Klaas Schilder in the Netherlands had suffered at the hands of the Reformed churches in his own country. He had been unjustly deposed from office in the same way as Hoeksema. The year of his deposition was 1944. Twice, in 1939 and in 1947, he had come to this country. Hoeksema had struck up a friendship with Schilder and had been influential in seeing to it that the pulpits of our churches were open to him. But, although Schilder and Hoeksema had much in common, they differed radically on the doctrine of the covenant. Hoeksema insisted that a unilateral and unconditional covenant was taught in Scripture and the confessions; Schilder taught a bilateral and conditional covenant. Hoeksema insisted that only the elect children of believers were included in that covenant. Schilder insisted that all the children of believers had some place in it.

Many of the ministers in the

Protestant Reformed Churches began to teach and preach Schilder's views, until the church was rocked with controversy. In 1953 the controversy was settled only through a difficult split, which took nearly two-thirds of the ministers and members out of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Another denomination was formed which eventually returned to the Christian Reformed Church.

In that controversy Hoeksema played a major role—in his preaching, his writing, and his defense of the faith on the floor of the assemblies. He understood that the conditional theology of Schilder and his followers constituted a serious threat to the doctrines of sovereign grace and that the very right of existence for the Protestant Reformed Churches demanded that they hold unswervingly to the truth of unconditional salvation. It was what Hoeksema had fought for in his battle against common grace; it was

still what had to be defended, if the churches of which he was a part would survive faithful to their heritage.

God gave the Protestant Reformed Churches the victory. It is true that the numbers of the denomination were severely diminished. It is also true that the controversy was bitter and difficult. But God preserved the cause of the Protestant Reformed Churches, that there might be a denomination which uncompromisingly continued to teach the same truths which the whole church of Christ throughout the ages has loved.

But it was indeed the last battle for an old and weary warrior.

Although Hoeksema lived for another twelve years and took part in rebuilding a shattered denomination, God ended his work before He ended his life. He died in September of 1965 and went to his eternal resting place.

... to be continued. □

## Search the Scriptures

Rev. Mitchell Dick

# "The Raising of Lazarus" (1)

(John 11)

**T**he history recorded in John 11 is about Jesus' raising from the dead one Lazarus.

We do not know much of Lazarus. He was of the town of Bethany, nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs (two miles) off (11:18). His sisters were the devout and devoted Mary and Martha.

The most significant fact of Lazarus is that he was loved of Jesus. Pointed reference is made to this fact in the narrative. In verse three we are told that the sisters sent unto Jesus saying, "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." Verse five tells us: "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." When Jesus wept (v.35), the Jews exclaimed, "Behold how he loved him!" (v. 36).

In response to the love of Jesus, Lazarus loved Jesus. He whom Jesus loves will *always* be constrained, willingly, to love back (cf. 2 Cor. 5:14)! This love of Lazarus

for Jesus is not evident, of course, in John 11. But in John 12 we read of Lazarus and his sisters showing hospitality to Jesus in their house. Lazarus is sitting at the table with Jesus (12:2). There is no doubt in my mind that Lazarus' main course at this meal was Jesus' words!

Lazarus also became a preacher. He is a strange preacher! He is one of the only, if not *the* only, "silent preacher" in the Bible—we never read of him ever having said a word. But we note that in chapter 12, verses 10 and 11, the chief priests counseled to put Lazarus to death because that

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"by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus" (v. 11). His being alive was a sermon! No need for him to talk, just live! Just live after you have died, and you are a sermon! But there is no doubt that, if he had a mouth to speak, Lazarus declared Jesus, "the resurrection and the life"!

The narrative of John 11 is about the sickness, death, and resurrection of Lazarus from the dead. We learn also something of the personalities and faith of Mary and Martha. Then, too, there is the nefarious plotting of the Jews who, at this miracle of Jesus, rather panic, thinking that if Jesus is allowed to continue to do such miracles "all men will believe on him, and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation" (vv. 47, 48).

The focus of the passage is,

however, not on Lazarus, nor on Mary, nor Martha, nor the wicked Pharisees. Nor is it even on the miracle of the raising of Lazarus. Rather, it is on Jesus Himself. The express purpose of the sickness and miraculous raising of Lazarus was, after all, "for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby" (11:4). The Lord, at this time, declares His Messianic identity as "the resurrection and the life." Martha declares her faith that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of God, that should come into the world" (v. 27). And even the wicked high priest Caiaphas, though wresting the scriptures to his own destruction, and though hardly aware of what he was saying, prophesies of the necessity of the atoning death of Jesus—for the Jews and Gentiles (11:49-52)!

Yes! Indeed! John 11 is not,

primarily, about the death of Lazarus. It is about the death of Jesus! Nor is John 11 primarily about the raising of Lazarus. It is about the raising of Jesus! The Son of God! For His glory! The resurrection and the life!

One result of this extremely significant miracle of our Lord was that many Jews believed on Jesus (v. 45). Indeed, in a certain sense, the result of this miracle was that the *world* went after Jesus (12:19)!

Another result of the gospel of the resurrection of Lazarus was that others plotted, now officially, the death of Jesus (vv. 46-53).

And what, my friends, is the result of this miracle in you?

Believest thou this ... this resurrecting Jesus? This the resurrection and the life?

Believest thou this ... as thou dost search the Scriptures?

## For Study, Meditation, & Discussion

### 1. History.

Lazarus was taken ill. It was a fatal illness. Jesus was sent for by Lazarus' sisters, Mary and Martha. No doubt they hoped Jesus would come and heal Lazarus (proof for this is found in that both sisters recall Lazarus to Jesus as "the one Jesus loves"—Martha, in verse 21, and Mary in verse 32). Be able to explain the history: What took place after Jesus is sent for, and while Jesus delays (vv. 3-16); His conversations with Martha and Mary (vv. 17-32); the raising of Lazarus (vv. 33-44); and the events which occurred immediately after (vv. 45ff.).

### 2. For the glory of God (v. 4).

Jesus' statement in verse 4 gives the purpose of the sickness of Lazarus, and, by implication, of the miracle of Jesus' resurrecting Lazarus: "It is not unto death, but

for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby...."

The glory of God! God *is* glorious. His glory is His own holiness and majesty. It is that revealed. It is the scintillating quality of the divine perfection. It is God *declaring* Himself to be God in all the works of His hands (Ps. 19; Is. 6:3). It is God *shining* in His perfection in His Son incarnate, full of grace and truth (John 1:14, 18).

Now this sickness was said of Jesus to be "for" the glory of God—"for," or "on behalf of," the promotion of the glory of God. That is: it was so that God's glory would be further revealed.

How, precisely, will Lazarus' sickness, which is "not unto death," be for God's glory (Hint: what virtues of God in Christ will be revealed?)? How does Jesus *know* that this sickness will be for the

glory of God? What does Jesus mean when He says in the next breath that this sickness will be for the glory of God that (in order that) the *Son of God* might be glorified thereby (by the sickness)? Discuss this in light of the fact that God says that He will not give His glory unto another (Is. 48:11).

Note all that Jesus *does*, when He first hears of Lazarus' sickness, in order that the glory of God be promoted. When He hears of Lazarus' sickness He waits (v. 6); then He goes into Judea, despite the danger, and the warning of the disciples (vv. 7, 8).

It is significant that Jesus does these things, and many other things, for the glory of God. He knows that the sickness of Lazarus *is* unto the glory of God. But this knowledge, and His knowledge that *all* is ultimately for the glory of God, do not diminish one iota



the Savior's ardent striving for the promotion of the glory of God. He who knows God's sovereignty most knows most His responsibility with respect to Father's claims upon

Him!

Find, meditate upon, and discuss other passages where Jesus shows a great concern for the glory

of God. How do we show this concern? Discuss this proposition: All is for the glory of God, so let us live that our lives *might be* for the glory of God. □

Address at Annual RFPA Meeting

Rev. Mitchell Dick

# The RFPA and Religious Stew (1)

**T**hank you for the opportunity to address you tonight at this, the annual meeting of the Reformed Free Publishing Association.

Thank you, and may God, Allah, Buddha, Yahweh, Jehovah, Cosmic Consciousness, and "all that is," bless you!

Before I am tarred and feathered, or worse—my brethren, lend me your ears!

This bizarre pronouncement of blessing from many gods is not, of course, mine. It was that of a woman who offered it as a conclusion to a letter to the editor of a certain paper, in which letter she had passionately promoted religious tolerance. She sought to convince the public that the religions of the world are, and ought to be, all one.

One Gregory Koukle, in an article of the Spring, 1997 issue of the *Christian Research Journal* about this view of the tolerance of many religions, calls the phenomenon of religious tolerance *religious stew*. He criticizes the stew and the view

behind it as "an unexamined faith not worth believing."

My goal tonight is to tell you of the RFPA about this religious stew.

I would have the RFPA and her writers duly warned: this religious stew has become very popular, but it is very poisonous! Religious stew is the latest of fast and easy theological food — approved, maybe, by the FDA, certainly by all of society, but not, indeed emphatically not, by God! We must be warned, therefore, also in our Christian publishing ventures, not to bite into this stew!

I speak also tonight to encourage the RFPA and her writers to continue to publish against such stew and to publish instead the Manna, the gospel of the truth as it is in Jesus and in Jesus alone.

## What Is Religious Stew?

Religious stew is what is called today "pluralism," religious pluralism.

What is "pluralism"? What is pluralism in the religious realm?

Religious pluralism is the belief that all the mainline religions mixed together are the true religion. No one religion is the true religion. But mix Buddhism, Mohammedanism, Shintoism, Judaism, and Christianity together, and *voilà!*—there you have it, the

true religion, religious stew.

Pluralism is the view that there is in the practice of most religions a (common) salvation. For pluralism sees in many religions this same good thing which it defines as salvation: "The transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to Reality centeredness" (D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God*, Zondervan, 1996).

Pluralism. Salvation in many religions. Different religions, all leading to God. Many spokes on the same wheel, the hub of which is God.

Why the stir? What are some of the reasons why this new religion, this religious stew, has been made, and why religious stew is such a popular item on the ecclesiastical menu today?

D.A. Carson, in the book just cited, notes several reasons. Among the main reasons for this stew, this religious pluralism, and its popularity today are, Carson believes, other kinds of pluralism.

There is, for example, *empirical pluralism*. By this, Carson refers to the great diversity of culture, race, value systems, etc. in our nation and in the world generally today. This in itself has provided a great impetus for the pursuit and acceptance also of *religious pluralism*.

There is also what Carson calls *cherished pluralism*. There is today

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the *desire* for pluralism. It is such a desire that pluralism, the acceptance of many different religions, and many different whatever, has become a *value in itself*. "Choice" has become a value in itself, a priority of our time. As Carson notes: "To be modern is to be addicted to choice and change...." Ours is the era of "tolerance," and therefore of pluralism.

Then there is *philosophical or hermeneutical pluralism*. This, according to Carson, is the idea that all interpretations of everything are equally valid; it is the view that no religion may claim superiority; it is the view that there is no objective truth. Truth is "relativized, democratized, trivialized." The only dirty word, the only heresy among the pluralists, is calling anything heretical. Basically, such pluralism is the strident attempt to "gag God"—to silence the voice that there is only one truth, and that it is to be heard and honored.

Other causes for religious pluralism could be noted. I cite just one more which, I believe, is a great force behind the stew. It is this: the *sheer pragmatism* of our day. If it works, do it! And since "doing it" requires unity on all fronts, then let's unite religiously! There is a great need for social equality and justice for all. Let us unite the religions of the world to promote this equality and justice for all! There are many poor among us. Let the church people and the temple people and all the religious people forget their differences, roll up their sleeves, pool resources, and feed the poor! There are the needs of world peace; saving the world from ecological disaster; preserving the family. So, religions of the world, unite! Tolerate. Honor. Join hands. Learn from each other. Do not judge. Stew. Good stew. For a good cause! Come and get it!

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Sound far out? Sound like a

stew served only in the greasy spoons of the (religious) ghetto? Sound as if only hungry apostates would bite? Sound as if we who are orthodox and we who eat at Russ' would certainly not be tempted?

Let us not be so naïve! There is, in fact, evidence that pluralism is *the main issue* confronting and corrupting the church today, and that it is making inroads, into the Reformed camp as well.

I could cite the fact that a recent survey of the next generation of Christians at several evangelical colleges revealed that only two-thirds believed Christ to be the only way to salvation. Or we could deduce from the fact that the 1990s is the only decade since the 1940s to show a decline in the number of missionaries sent out that it is religious pluralism, the belief that all religions are equally valid, which has dampened the spirit of the church to disciple the nations for Christ only.

But there is another, more disturbing fact, something which ought to alarm us, warn us, rouse us. There is another evidence that much of Christendom is opening its collective mouth to swallow the religious stew of pluralism. It is this: many so-called Christians and Christian churches today, though not buying outright the religious stew, have nevertheless concocted their own brand of *mush*.

### Mush

What is this mush? By "mush" I refer to contemporary Christianity's *inclusivism*.

What is inclusivism?

Inclusivism is the teaching of various Christian leaders, and the stance of various Christian denominations, that though Christianity is the final and best and ultimate religion, yet it is not the only true religion. The Bible, hearing it preached, and believing its contents are not, therefore, necessary to a saving knowledge of the truth. Other people who may go by the

name of Buddhist or Moslem are, in the practice of their religion, really "anonymous Christians," to use the phrase of Karl Rahner. Though they have not the privilege of instruction in the gospel, God does not hold it against them, but saves them for the good practice of their religions, even and including their bowing down to idols, which are, after all, and ultimately, only so many expressions of the one God.

Inclusivism is the view, in other words, that though Christ is necessary for salvation, conscious faith in Him is not: He died for all, atonement was necessary, but some will become Christians only after the judgment day, who unconsciously were Christians in their practicing of religion according to the light given them.

Evidence of "mush" abounds.

I cite only the following:

First, I see as evidence of Christianity's own brand of pluralistic mush a kind of "ethic of civility," as someone has called it, among Christians and other religious folk. Nothing wrong with being civil! But there is a kind of civility today in which Christians are seeking to "dialogue" with those of other religions, and that is all. There is no attempt to preach and to evangelize, but only to respect and glean from those of other religions. Noteworthy in this regard is the ongoing dialogue with the Jews which Christian churches are having. In these dialogues it is assumed that Jews and Christians worship the same God. There is talk of a common Judeo-Christian ethic and heritage. There is unity and focus on the preservation of the family and advancing social causes. There are shared worship services, as a recent celebration of the Passover in a local fundamentalist church attests.

Then there are these evidences in the Protestant camp: an RCA minister declares faith that there are more ways to heaven than faith in Jesus; a Lutheran leader speaks



of "the gospel of Jesus as not destroying but fulfilling other religions."

Just one more evidence. This time Roman mush. The Roman Catholic Church in many ways has led the way in the promotion of mush. Mush is in fact Roman Catholic doctrine. For Vatican II, in section 16 of *Lumen Gentium*, states: "Those also can attain to everlasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them, through the dictates of conscience. Nor does divine Providence deny the help necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, but who strive to live a good life, thanks to His grace" (quoted in an article entitled "Why Christianity of All Religions," by Klaas Runia, in the November, 1996 issue of *REC Theological Forum*). Rome also speaks of God "smiling" upon the Moslems who, with Rome, share adoration of Mary (cf. the book *Mary of the Koran: A Meeting Point between Christianity and Islam*, by a Rev. Nilo Geagea).

### Brief Critique of Inclusivism

Christian inclusivists attempt to justify their position from Scripture. But, at every point, there is a perverting and twisting of that which God calls us rightly to divide.

There is talk, for example, of the "faith principle" which all men, even non-Christians, can have in God. This is a faith in God, even though it may not be faith in Christ. It is a faith, nevertheless, acceptable to God. This "faith principle," this "theocentric religion" which need not be "Christocentric," is taught, say the inclusivists, in a text such as Hebrews 11:6: "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that

diligently seek him." Just faith in God, not in Jesus, is necessary.

Inclusivists have their way of getting around John 14:6 and Jesus' words: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." The Roman Catholic inclusivist Paul Knitter interprets Jesus' words as applying to Christians only. That is: only for Christians is Jesus the only way to the Father. John's language, according to Knitter, is not absolute, applying to all everywhere, but rather is the language of one who knows of Christ and loves Him, and boasts of Him as a husband would of His wife, describing her as the most beautiful woman in the world. In fact, the woman may *not* be the most beautiful woman in the world, but to the husband she is; in fact, *Christ is not the only way to the Father, but to those who know Him He is!* John 14:6 is love language, not absolute language.

Acts 10:34,35 is a favorite text of inclusivists. There, with regard to Cornelius, Peter declares: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." Thus, according to inclusivists, Cornelius and others may be accepted of God *before* they are converted to Christianity, or apart from their ever being converted. As they practice their religion righteously, even apart from knowledge of the gospel, they are "anonymous Christians," God's people, doing the best with the knowledge given.

What do we say to all this?

In the first place, with regard to this "faith principle" thing, it is absolutely unbiblical. Faith in Scripture is ever faith in Christ—faith in God revealed in Christ. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). Eternal life is knowing God *and* knowing Jesus

Christ whom God has sent (John 17:3).

John 14:6? If Jesus is saying here that He is "the way" to the Father just for those who like to think He is the only way—well then we have lost our Bible, and we have lost our ability to interpret it. There is no hint here of Jesus maintaining He is only "a way" for some, but not for all. There is no hint here that John 14:6 is only John's interpretation of Jesus' words, and not Jesus' words themselves. Jesus is the way *absolutely*, as He says He is!

The inclusivist's interpretation of Acts 10:34,35 must also be jettisoned. Peter is not saying, in flat contradiction to the rest of Scripture, that Cornelius or anyone else is accepted of God because of his own righteousness, or before faith in Christ. The teaching is simply that God has His people in every nation, not just in Israel, *whom He will bring to faith in Christ*. Thus this man of the Italian band (!) was brought out of darkness into the light and salvation of God in Christ to receive remission of sins through Christ's name and through faith in that name (Acts 10:43).

Much more could be offered in critique of the inclusivist position. There is, for example, its open denial of the sinfulness of sin. Inclusivism imagines people seeking God apart from Christ; denies the imputed guilt and inherited corruption of Adam; does not reckon with the wrath of God upon sin. With Anselm we say to the inclusivists: "Ye have not weighed the seriousness of sin!"

There is a perversion also of the doctrine of God.

Denying that Christ is the only way and that faith in Christ is the only way to the Father, inclusivists compromise the holiness and justice of God. God who is holy and just demands satisfaction for sin. Christ alone did this on the cross. Faith alone is the only way Christ's merits are applied to God's people. To say that one does not need faith



in Christ to be saved is to say that Christ and the imputation of His righteousness to us do not really matter—to God or to people! The cross was not really necessary! Sin is not really so bad! God is not really so God!

There is latent in the inclusivist doctrine also a wrong view of the love of God. Crucial to the inclusivist doctrine of the possibility of salvation through other means than conscious faith in Christ is the teaching that God loves everyone. It is for this rea-

son, His universal love, that salvation is made possible apart from Christ. God is *so* loving, say the inclusivists, that surely He would not let the mass of men perish simply because they heard not the gospel! But this idea of a universal love is foreign to the Scriptures. God loves His own. But the reprobate wicked His soul hates (Psalm 5:5; 11:5). One expression of God's wrath is His *not* bringing the gospel to all men, but leaving many in darkness!

Further, there is, behind the inclusivist mush, error with regard

to the truth of God's revelation. Inclusivists say that there is a general revelation, a light in nature, a natural law by the light of which sinners, even apart from the preaching of the gospel, can be saved. But Scripture teaches that all that is revealed from God in nature to the wicked is God's wrath (Romans 1:18ff.), and that, to leave the sinner without excuse! Salvation is not through the light of nature, but of the gospel, and the preaching of it: Romans 10:14ff.

... to be continued □

Annual RFPA Meeting

Mr. Bob Vermeer

## Secretary's Report

According to the Constitution of the Reformed Free Publishing Association, the purpose of the RFPA is to witness to the truth contained in the Word of God as expressed in the three forms of unity and to reveal false and deceptive views repugnant thereto. In order to effectuate this purpose, the Association publishes and distributes the *Standard Bearer*, and also publishes in book form the writings of our Protestant Reformed professors, ministers, and educators, as well as good material in the Reformed tradition.

God has enabled us to publish the *SB* for the past 73 years and has richly blessed our labors. We have been told recently that we are one of the oldest religious periodicals currently published in the

United States, second only to the *Banner*. We are now mailing more than 2,500 copies per issue of the *SB*, 45% of which go to non-Protestant Reformed subscribers. We have 339 subscribers in 30 different foreign countries. Among the countries to which we send the *SB* are the following: the Philippines, Indonesia, Romania, Hungary, Switzerland, India, and the Netherlands. Added in the past year were Latvia, Korea, Denmark, Hong Kong, Myanmar, Malta, Greece, Peru, and Brazil.

Gifts and collections have reached an all-time high; from \$17,000 in 1985 to \$45,000 in 1997. This is a remarkable increase and reason for special word of thanks to all who remember this worthy cause with their gifts. These gifts and collections cover over half the cost of publishing the *SB*.

Ever since the RFPA board took on the book publishing responsibility two years ago, a large proportion of our work has involved

book publication. We continue to fine-tune our operations to assure more timely completion of our book publication projects.

We have been graciously provided accommodations in the seminary basement for our operation and continue to enjoy a good working relationship with the Theological School Committee. We thank them for their willingness to allow us to operate in their facility.

To assist us in the publication process, we have hired a manuscript editor. Having a qualified person take on this responsibility will help to insure that the books we publish are of high quality, error-free, and with a reading style that complements the subject matter. This in turn will help to insure that our books are marketable and that our organization maintains a reputation for producing only well-written materials. Gary VanDer Schaaf has been hired as our manuscript editor. Besides editing manuscripts, Gary is working

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*Mr. Vermeer is the retiring secretary of the RFPA.*



with our *SB* Business Manager, Don Doezeema, to develop an editor's protocol to standardize grammar, usage, and punctuation for all RFPA publications, including the *SB*. This will shorten time spent editing and promote consistency. We take this opportunity to thank Gary for his assistance and expertise in the past year.

Although we have not had a new book to offer in the past year, we have been busy preparing new books and reprinting existing titles. It looks quite certain that we will have one or two books out by the end of this calendar year. Besides the three revisions/reprints and four new book projects mentioned in last year's annual report, we have two other projects which are worthy of note. One project is an updated *SB* Index which will soon come out on CD ROM. The other project is placing all *SB* volumes on one CD, including an index and search capability.

We have expended a lot of effort this past year promoting the *SB* and our book publications. A subscription drive for the *SB* and the Book Club was conducted via an insert card in the *SB*. At its completion, we had gained 80 new subscribers for the *SB* from 386 trial subscriptions and 157 gift subscriptions. Since most of these trial subscriptions and gift subscriptions were suggested or given by our regular subscribers, this demonstrates a commendable willingness on the part of our subscribers to promote the *SB* among acquaintances. These efforts do pay off. We also added 125 new Book Club members, bringing our total to about 540. We encourage those who appreciate good Reformed literature to join our Book Club. For you, there is a 35% discount on all of our books. For the RFPA, there is a guaranteed outlet for our new publications, allowing us to recover immediately much of our publication costs in order to begin work on new titles.

Our RFPA Books Catalog was

widely distributed this year, giving our literature a lot of new exposure. Our sales from books increased over 50% this past year, as we have sent our books around the world, adding 400 new customers and a dozen new bookstores.

We have purchased a mobile display rack for displaying and selling RFPA literature at lectures, conferences, ecclesiastical gatherings, evangelism events, etc. Be sure to let the board know of such events so that we can have the display rack available. We would also like to encourage some of our churches or evangelism committees to start their own display rack of RFPA literature. We offer book discounts for such endeavors.

We have also begun taking advantage of the Internet as a powerful means to witness to the truth and advertise our publications. We gave Rev. VanBaren permission to include the *SB* on Loveland's homepage, and we put the RFPA catalog on the homepage of the Mission Committee. We have also enlisted the service and expertise of Tim Hanko to design the RFPA's own homepage.

The board has recently begun trying to obtain persons in the PRC outside the Grand Rapids area who are willing to promote RFPA books to Christian bookstores in their community, giving four books free of charge for each store as starters. In this way a more personal touch can be added to our attempt to promote our literature in Reformed communities.

Prof. Engelsma had two live, hour-long radio interviews on a Richmond, VA station. The interviews were on his book *Marriage: The Mystery of Christ and the Church*. This is an indication that our books are circulated and accepted in areas other than our PR communities.

Recently, Prof. Engelsma was interviewed as the editor of the *SB* by *Christian Renewal*. Through this means, Prof. Engelsma was able to inform the conservative Reformed

world in North America about the *SB*, its origins, and its purposes.

We give Prof. Engelsma our heartfelt thanks for his devotion as Editor-in-Chief to the publication of the *SB*. We also extend a sincere word of appreciation to the department editors and guest writers of the *SB*, as well as to our book authors. We thank our God for giving us the truth of His Word and servants who faithfully proclaim that truth.

Our *SB* Business Manager, Don Doezeema, and our Book Publications Manager, Ev Langerak, have worked hard over the last year to see that the work of publishing the *SB* and our books is completed. Their efforts are gratefully appreciated, as are the efforts of several capable assistants: Judi Doezeema, who typesets each issue of the *SB* and many of our books; Dirk Westra who helps in proofreading book manuscripts; and Brenda Brands who provides general assistance, especially in the preparation of the cumulative *SB* Index. We offer a special thanks to John and Hermie Veldman for faithfully assisting in the mailing of every issue of the *SB*.

We thank our retiring board members, Ed Hoekstra, Harv Holstege, John Kalsbeek, and Bob Vermeer, for their labors in the past three years. Such labor is without material reward, but we work in the knowledge that our cause is to distribute our literature for the purpose of giving God all the praise, honor, and glory. We ask that you continue to pray for us in our labors as your board.

As we begin the 74<sup>th</sup> volume year, we are encouraged by the words of the apostle Paul recorded in I Corinthians 15:58, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

Respectfully submitted,  
Bob Vermeer, Secretary □



# Jesus, Jehovah-Salvation (2)

*Thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.*

Matthew 1:21

**T**hat is the gospel, the precious gospel, spoken by the angel of the Lord to Joseph and recorded in Matthew.

In our consideration of the name Jesus, we have seen that His divinely appointed name reveals Him to us as Jehovah-salvation, our Savior. He is a complete Savior. Not only did He accomplish salvation for a people, but He also works that salvation in those whom He saves, not leaving it up to them to complete that salvation.

When we confess Jesus as the complete Savior, we confess that He saves us in such a way that all our life is affected. Indeed, by His wonder work of grace we are given life! The Almighty God of our salvation comes to us with His powerful, efficacious Word of grace and breaks our stubborn wills. He softens our hard hearts, making us sincerely willing and ready to live unto Him.

Jesus does that. He gives us spiritual life, a life which finds its focus in fellowship with our heavenly Father, a life which knows that there is one only comfort, and that is to belong with body and soul, in life and death, to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ.

What a great salvation is ours in Christ Jesus!

We have something far more than the world could even hope for!

Jesus our Savior does not

merely bring about some form of reformation in state government and in federal government and on the local level, so that eventually this world becomes a nice place in which to live. He does not merely bring about social reformation, so that earthly poverty is eliminated and injustice is a thing of the past. He does not merely bring about victory over diseases, such as cancer, so that we can live a long life on the earth.

Those things, nice as they may be, could not begin to touch the surface of the glory which He reveals as the wonder work of His grace! He is not a Savior who merely patches things up, makes some outward improvements, and helps His people to feel good about their state.

Oh, no. Far better! He is *Jesus, Savior*, the mighty God of our salvation, who comes with His almighty Word to you and to me and makes us new creatures in an old world!

In fact, He makes us pilgrims and strangers, citizens of the *heavenly* kingdom, who enjoy a relationship of love and fellowship with God our Father that the world cannot even begin to comprehend. He saves us in such a way that we live in the midst of this world of darkness, and yet are children of the light.

He does not merely seek admittance into our hearts; He makes room. He dethrones sin, and enthrones Himself. He lives in us by His Holy Spirit, sanctifying us, purifying us, causing us to turn from sin unto the living God. He awakens within us a longing for God and His fellowship, and nurtures that longing in us, so that it grows.

He preserves us as His people, so that all the powers of darkness are only servants in the building, for the strengthening of His church.

And then—as if all those things were not glorious enough—He prepares for us a place in heaven. And when He has finished His work with us in this world, He will come and take us unto Himself, that where He is, there we may be also. That is the wonderful gospel proclaimed in the name JESUS. Jehovah saves!

## A Particular Savior

But make no mistake—He does not save all men. He does not. That was not His intention. That was not His desire. That was not His work.

Jesus is a particular Savior. He will not save all.

On the one hand, there are those who openly oppose Him and manifest their hatred against Him, who are simply given over to their sins, to darkness and death. This also is according to the sovereign counsel and decree of God.

On the other hand, there are those who are outwardly religious, who even profess to believe in Him; but who do *not* believe in Him as the Jesus revealed in Holy Scripture. Jesus Himself spoke of them in His sermon on the mount, when He said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew

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you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. 7:21-23).

All men are not saved.

So Scripture teaches throughout, giving its warning even to those within the church institute.

But His name is *Jesus*, for He shall save *His people* from their sins. So says Scripture in Matthew 1:21. So teaches Scripture throughout.

His people are the elect who have been given Him by His Father from before the foundation of the world. Jesus died for them. He died for them only.

Jesus died for a definite number of people. And that definite number is not determined by the people, but by the living God.

Jesus taught that clearly when He said in John 10, "I lay down my life for the sheep," and then identified those sheep as those which the Father gave Him. That is the truth set forth throughout the whole of the Bible. And this truth is fundamental.

I realize that this particular aspect of the gospel is generally denied today. Sadly, it is denied now even in many so-called Reformed circles. Today a Jesus is preached who, although He does not save all men, nevertheless *desires* to save all. Today they say that He did not die in order to save a chosen few, but He died to save everybody, if only men will give themselves to Him.

In many Reformed circles the lie of Arminianism is wholeheartedly embraced. And the same poisoned gospel that embraced the Romish church prior to the Reformation now embraces many of the churches whose roots are in that Reformation.

Oh, yes, we may say this: Jesus saves believers.

Do you believe?

The call of the gospel is this: Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved.

But let us ask: Who are believers?

Scripture identifies them. They are those who belong to the elect organism of the world, those who have been born again by the Spirit of Christ, and who have been given to see therefore the things of the kingdom of God.

They are those who know that they are lost. They know the devastating nature of their sin. But they hear the Word of God that says (Luke 19:10), "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

They are those who are weary and heavy laden under the burden of their own sin and guilt and shame. But they hear the call of Jesus, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." They are those,

according to the words of the same Jesus (John 10), who hear His voice and know Him, and follow Him.

That is a believer, according to the Word of God.

*Jesus* is the Savior whose very name demands faith.

What terrible desolation and unrest is found in the hearts and lives of those who reject Jesus the Savior, who will have nothing to do with Him.

Some of you know only too well that unrest of living apart from Christ. All of us have experienced that there is no peace in the way of sin and unrighteousness. There is no peace in living apart from Jesus.

True faith finds the only comfort there is and the peace that passes all understanding in Him alone who is our righteousness and our salvation. His name is Jesus. He saves His people from their sins.

His name demands faith. But that faith He also works in our hearts by His Spirit. He works that faith which cries out, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." He works that faith which lays hold of Jesus.

Do you believe?

Then you know what the apostle meant when he said (Acts 3:26), "God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." □

**Go Ye Into All the World**

**Rev. Allen Brummel**

## Animism

*Rev. Brummel is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Edgerton, Minnesota.*

*I intend to write a series of articles which introduce the major false religions of the world. My desire is that these articles will equip the reader both to be on his guard against the lie and to speak the truth in opposition to it. May God increasingly use us and our churches to bring the comforting gospel of Jesus Christ cruci-*

*fied to those who are in bondage to these lies.*

### What is Animism?

**I**n simple terms, Animism is used to describe a form of religion which worships spirits, as distinguished from the worship of God or gods. The influence of ani-



mism is worldwide, underlying virtually all of the major religions of the world. Animism is especially evident among primitive groups such as the American Indians, the Aborigines of Australia, the Eskimos, and most of the tribes of Africa and South America. In fact, of late, the term "Animism" is being replaced by the term "Primal Religion," which is thought to be more broad and descriptive. But the term "Primal Religion" seems to imply that the only people holding this form of religion are primitive peoples, when in reality even the sophisticated are among its adherents.

Animism is present in the United States, although it is often more subconscious than is the deliberate spirit-worship found in more primitive societies. Americans reveal their preoccupation with spirits and the supernatural in the books they read, the movies they attend, and the superstitions which they believe affect how their day may proceed.<sup>1</sup>

Animism in its narrowest sense is preoccupied with the concept of the soul. All men seem to be aware of a soul as distinct from the body. The common belief is that the soul is as a little man inside the body, who indicates his presence by the movements of that body. When the body dies, the soul will escape from the body. Concerning those souls that escape, many questions arise: Where have they gone? Are they capable of exercising power and influence over the living? If they do pose a threat, what measures can be taken to minimize that threat? What measures can be taken to insure that the souls are removed as far as possible from the living?

The driving concern of the animist is the security of the living in relation to the souls of those who have departed. Souls which have departed from men and women are viewed as unfriendly and prone to do harm to those who remain on earth. Especially the souls of those

who die violent deaths are thought to remain on earth in order to bring misfortune to their neighbors.

One method of appeasing the souls is by offering sacrifices and worshiping the departed ancestors. This worship is not performed out of respect and reverence for the dead, as is true among some religions and peoples. Animistic people perform ancestor worship out of tragic fear of the possible threat which the souls of the dead pose.

The animist will take every opportunity to honor the dead. Harvey Hoekstra relates an experience among the Anuaks in the Sudan, Africa:

One morning an Anuak man from the village and I were hiking together to a distant village. We were visiting and conversing together as we walked. I was in front and he was close behind me. I'd been talking, but when I got no reply, I turned around to look and establish eye contact. The man was no longer there. I turned back and soon found him about 30 feet off the path. He was on his knees talking out loud to no one visible. He was in front of a dilapidated abandoned Anuak hut. I waited a moment before speaking, somewhat surprised to hear him talking to someone who obviously wasn't there. With no further explanation, my companion said, "I just stopped for a moment to greet our chief who once lived here before he died."

I understood better what it meant for Africans to honor the "living dead." It was important for my friend to keep on the right side of this dead person whose memory was vivid enough to cause his spirit to respond appropriately if he wasn't properly respected.<sup>2</sup>

One need not go to Africa to find this honoring and worshiping of the dead. Ancestor worship is common among immigrants to this country and even many Americans. Although it is not openly viewed as "ancestor worship," among

Americans there are many superstitions regarding a dead person's soul. Many believe that the soul will be angry and perhaps retaliate with evil if the departed one is not spoken kindly of and eulogized at the time of burial, if the grave is not visited frequently, if his possessions are not treated with respect, etc.

### Special Powers

The worship of souls involves more than simply worship of the dead. It assumes not only the survival of the souls of human beings after death, but also the existence of supernatural powers or "magic."

Where a belief in supernatural powers exists, utmost caution is taken to protect oneself from invisible attacks by the spirits and souls. This gives rise to the many taboos which govern every aspect of the life of an animist. One example from African culture has to do with taboos which are associated with pregnant women and newborn infants. Harvey Hoekstra relates some of these taboos which he saw among the Anuak tribe in Sudan, Africa:

Anuaks believed that a pregnant woman cast an evil shadow on certain things and events. The influence of a pregnant woman had to be counteracted. She mustn't be around the cattle or there might be miscarriages of calves. Cows would give less milk when a pregnant woman was around them.

The belief that a pregnant woman could actually cause a newborn baby's umbilical cord to pop out and not heal properly was very strong. Every Anuak believed this to be so. They called this influence "theri." . . .

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1 Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), p. 27.

2 Harvey Hoekstra, *Honey, We're Going to Africa*, (Mukilteo: Wine Press, Publishing, 1995), p. 102.



Whenever the navel of a newly born baby failed to heal properly and infection set in, the immediate, burning question was, "What pregnant woman caused 'theri'? Who did it?" And, if the baby died, it became a matter of life and death for the suspected person.<sup>3</sup>

American culture is saturated with taboos. The superstitious nature of Americans is seen in the popularity of astrological charts and horoscopes in the daily papers. Insignificant actions, such as opening an umbrella indoors, can create significant offense and even fear.

The animist lives in constant awareness of the powers of evil and is constantly attempting to appease them. On one occasion missionary Hoekstra stumbled on a group of village leaders who were discussing what to do with a little baby boy.

A person suspected of being a "shi-jwok" (one who would have the ability to cast evil spells on people, villages, and events) was greatly feared and people were always on the lookout for someone who might be a "shi-jwok" and have caused a misfortune. They were discussing the fate of a little, newborn baby whose testicle had not come down. A child born with that abnormality among the Anuaks was cursed and had to be killed. If allowed to grow to adulthood, this person would have the ability to curse people and cause great harm.<sup>4</sup>

Hoekstra convinced the men to go to bed and wait until morning to make a decision, hoping that they would then be more sober and save the life of the child. But later he heard that the baby had been killed the next morning. Writes Hoekstra: "My presence had delayed the inevitable, but had not prevented it. I was reminded again that without Jesus there is darkness, fear and superstition which brings death."<sup>5</sup>

### The Life of an Animist

The animist lives a life of fear, devoid of comfort. Four characteristics summarize the life of the animist. 1) The prevalence of fear, 2) the absence of anything in the nature of religious comfort, 3) no differentiation between good and evil, and 4) a fatalistic outlook on life.

Fear is the outstanding and most noticeable characteristic of Animism. "Never any waking moment of day or night is the animist parted from consciousness that he is surrounded by a host of evil spirits who may ruin his crops, or inflict other misfortunes, unless he walks warily and observes the necessary taboos."<sup>6</sup>

Selfishness also reigns among animistic people, exposing a complete absence of love. The entire religion is man-centered. While it may seem as though the animist upholds morals, upon closer examination one finds that the seemingly moral behavior is motivated by taboos and is not a sign of true spirituality at all. There is no concern about what is morally good or evil. Religious morals and love are entirely absent. Sin occurs when one goes against the understood customs or taboos.

The animist finds himself a slave to fear and self-love because he has turned aside from the worship of the one true God. This drives him to seek help from mediums, witch doctors, palm readers, star gazers, astrologers, horoscopes, etc. By forsaking the revelation of God in creation and through His Word, the animist has launched himself into the darkness of despair (Rom. 1:18-32).

The most commonly given reason as to why animists do not worship the true God is that they are not afraid of the Creator God. Primal religions view God as benevolent and loving. The devil and evil spirits, on the other hand, are seen as evil and fearful, so they are worshiped. The apostle Paul, in Romans 1:18-25, enlightens us as to

the true reason why the animist does not worship God. It is not merely because God is not feared, but it is because the true knowledge of Him is held under in unrighteousness. Animists see God's revelation in creation, but they reject it and worship spirits instead.

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (Romans 1:20, 21)

The animist is guilty of precisely the sin described in verse 25: "Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever."

### Exposing the Error of the Animist

The Bible clearly exposes the sin of animistic religion. We read in Leviticus 19:31: "Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your God." We must see this to include horoscopes, palm readers, and any other attempt to know the future through wicked men. I Samuel 28:6,7 relates the tragic incident of Saul seeking an answer to his dilemma from an evil spirit. Although the truth is revealed to Saul through this means, the truth condemns Saul and informs him of his certain destruction due to his rebellion against God.

The prophet Isaiah warns Babylon of her sinful, futile attempt to trust in sorceries and enchantments. Isaiah 47:11-14a:

Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know from whence it ariseth: and mischief shall fall upon thee; thou shalt not be able to put it off; and desola-



tion shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou shalt not know. Stand now with thine enchantments, and with the multitude of thy sorceries, wherein thou hast laboured from thy youth; if so be thou shalt be able to profit, if so be thou mayest prevail. Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee. Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame.

Our society is filled with fear. In order to overcome that fear many, including some of our presidents, have tried to determine the future through horoscopes and palm readers. Men and women look for something to do in order to appease Jehovah God, but peace and comfort will not come through spirit worship, maintaining superstitions, or reading the stars.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the only power which is able to break

the fear of Animism and replace it with true peace. Indeed, there is a spiritual battle between the forces of evil and good, but Christ, the triumphant Lord, has defeated all principalities and powers. "And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Col. 2:15). In Christ Jesus we have been delivered from all the bondage of the devil and evil spirits. When God works the assurance of Christ's victory in the heart of His child, all animistic practices must be put aside. As difficult as it is to discard all the emotional and psychological baggage of a false religion, it is possible by the power of the regenerating Spirit. Our desire is to witness of God's wonderful work through Jesus Christ to all those who cling to this comfortless religion, whether they be here in America, or in other countries throughout the world. The power of God can and will bring all of His sheep out of their fearful, rebellious walk and bring them to know the joy of salvation.

The gospel of Christ crucified must be brought to the animist, both through personal witness by individual Christians and through the official preaching of the Word. Personally we must witness of the joy, peace, and freedom which we have in Jesus Christ. Never may we take that peace and freedom for granted! We will invite our superstitious, fearful neighbor to come with us to church to hear the wonder of Christ crucified. We pray that God will use the power of the preaching, both in our congregations and on the mission field, to convict and expose the man-centered, hopeless religion of the animist and replace it with the joy of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Our next article will focus on Hinduism, the Lord willing. □

3 *Ibid.* p. 107,8.

4 *Ibid.* 112, 113.

5 *Ibid.* p. 113.

6 J.N.D. Anderson, Editor *The World's Religions*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 18.

## News From Our Churches

## Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Evangelism Activities

The month of September saw the congregation of the Bethel PRC in Itasca, IL sponsor two classes for their community. These classes were held at the Elk Grove Library on September 18 and 25. The topics considered were, "The Bible: Absolute Truth," based on II Peter 1, and "What is the Life of a Christian?" as found in Romans 6.

The Evangelism Committee of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC planned a fall seminar, entitled "Behold, I Come Quickly," to run three consecutive Thursdays in October. Beginning on October 9, Rev. W. Bruinsma, pastor at Kalamazoo,

was scheduled to speak on the topic "Amillennialism," followed by "The Signs of Christ's Coming," and "The Last Days."

Rev. Mahtani, pastor of the Trinity PRC in Houston, TX, was asked to present the Reformed view of predestination to two of the high school classes at Texas Christian School in mid-September. Evidently he was well received, since he was invited back for a follow-up question and answer session.

### Congregational Activities

In a follow-up to our October 1 "News," we can now report that the sale of the church building of the First PRC in Holland, MI has been finalized. The sale was closed on September 26. This means that our Holland congregation is temporarily without a church home.

But for the present, at least, they will meet at Pine Creek Elementary School, located, for those of you who might have an occasion to go there, at 1184 136<sup>th</sup> Ave., north of West Ottawa High School, between Riley and Quincy Streets. We say temporary church home because we have also learned that work has already begun on their new church building. As of September 25 the footings were in, and best estimates called for completion of Holland's new building by June of next year.

The Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, Alberta, Canada reports that they were able to worship in their beautiful new church building for the first time on Sunday, September 21. Their contractor will now begin building a new parsonage near the church. Finances for the new parsonage are coming

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*Mr. Wigger is an elder in the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.*



from the sale of the old parsonage.

Progress also continues to be made on the 6.2 acres of property which will eventually become the home of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI. The occupants of that property moved out, and the Georgetown Fire Department planned to use the recently demolished barn as a practice site on October 2. They planned on the same for the garage in six weeks, and the house will follow in February, after many practice sessions in "search and rescue" in a smoke-filled home.

As far as plans for a new church building go, it has been determined that first a general sketch has to be adopted, with a general idea of the cost. To this end, slow progress is being made.

In a follow-up to our July 1<sup>st</sup> issue of the "News," we are also happy to report that the "In My Heart" memory project, the memorization of the book of James by members of the Hudsonville, MI PRC, is now completed. On Sunday evening, September 21, Hudsonville's congregation was invited to stay after the service for a short ceremony for distributing Bibles for those who participated. Over 100 originally signed on to memorize either a part or all of that book, and just under 100 finished the project, with 32 of those committing to memory the entire 108 verses of James in just ten weeks.

A special worship service was held on Friday, September 19, at the Hope PRC in Walker, MI for the ordination and installation of pastor-elect James Laning. Prof. Engelsma led the service and Prof. Hanko read the installation form. The following Lord's Day Rev. Laning preached his inaugural ser-

mon entitled, "Our God's Urgent Word of Comfort," based on Isaiah 40:1, 2. Plans called for a welcome program for the Lanings on October 17.

Two days later, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of September, pastor-elect Martin VanderWal was installed as the fourth pastor of the Covenant PRC in Wyckoff, NJ. Rev. K. Koole led the installation service. The service was followed by a welcome luncheon for the VanderWal family. The following Sunday Rev. VanderWal preached his inaugural sermon, based on II Corinthians

1:23, 24 and entitled, "Preaching Christ Crucified." We rejoice that God has continued graciously to provide men for the ministry of the Word in our churches. Let us all remember the exhortation of Ephesians 6:19 and pray for those two men, and for all our ministers, that utterance may be given them that they may open their mouths boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel.

### *Food for Thought*

"God chooses us, not because we believe, but that we may believe."

—Augustine □

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On November 4,

#### **GEORGE and DOROTHY ENGELSMA**

will celebrate their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, the Lord willing.

We are grateful to our heavenly Father for their faithfulness to each other and to the church these many years, as well as for their membership in our family.

May the faithful God of the everlasting covenant continue to uphold and bless them the rest of the way of their pilgrimage.

"The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 33:27a).

*The Engelsma family*

Grand Rapids, Michigan

### TEACHER NEEDED

The Northwest Iowa Protestant Reformed School will need a teacher for the lower grades for the 1998-1999 school year. Interested parties can contact Chester Hunter (home phone: 712-726-3381, school phone: 712-726-3200) or write the school at P.O. Box 67, Doon, IA 51235.

### NOTICE!

In much gratitude to God the

#### **REV. WAYNE BEKKERING**

is recognized for his 25 years of faithful service in the ministry of God's Word and sacraments.

Faithfully and diligently he has labored in four pastorates within the denomination. Previously he labored in God's service in Randolph PRC in Randolph, WI for five years; in Trinity PRC in Houston, TX for seven years; and then in Faith PRC in Jenison, MI for five years. And for the past seven years he has been the pastor of Pella PRC in Pella, IA.

May the God of the harvest richly bless the brother and his faithful helpmeet.

"I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding" (Jeremiah 3:15).

### New Webpage!

In connection with the celebration of their 10th anniversary, Covenant Evangelical Reformed Churches in Singapore has set up a webpage, as a means of outreach and a source of information for ongoing events in the ERCS. The address is:

<http://home.pacific.net.sg/~cerc/>